

Masthead Logo

**The Palimpsest**

Volume 35 | Number 5

Article 6

5-1-1954

# The Southern Iowa Railway

Frank P

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest>

Part of the [United States History Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

P, F. "The Southern Iowa Railway." *The Palimpsest* 35 (1954), 203-206.  
Available at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/palimpsest/vol35/iss5/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Palimpsest by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact [lib-ir@uiowa.edu](mailto:lib-ir@uiowa.edu).



## The Southern Iowa Railway

The Southern Iowa Railway started as a steam road and was later electrified. At various times it was operated independently or by larger systems, and again there were months when it did not operate at all. Much of the road's earlier records are hard to come by, but there is enough evidence to indicate that its history was both colorful and hectic.

The original company, according to L. L. Taylor's *Past and Present of Appanoose County*, was chartered May 6, 1879, as the Centerville, Moravia & Albia Railroad. It was built in 1880 as a branch of the Missouri, Iowa & Nebraska Railroad (then part of the Wabash system) and leased by the latter road. Francis M. Drake, of Centerville, and Russell Sage, of New York, were the leading promoters and for many years served as officials of the road.

For a time the Wabash operated its St. Louis-Des Moines trains in conjunction with the MI&N from Glenwood Junction, Missouri, to Centerville, and the CM&A from Centerville to Albia. Upon the disintegration of the Wabash system in 1885 the lease was canceled and the Centerville, Moravia & Albia was turned over to the bond-



holders. Operation thereafter was sporadic and the road remained idle for a time.

At the close of the eighties the CM&A was leased to the Iowa Central, headed by Russell Sage. It was reorganized in 1890 as the Albia & Centerville Railway. The Iowa Central, which subsequently became part of the Minneapolis & St. Louis, continued to operate it until 1910. A new company, headed by W. A. Boland, of New York, with J. L. Sawyers, of Centerville, as vice-president, reorganized the Albia & Centerville in February, 1910, changing its name to the Southern Iowa Traction Company. Apparently no change in management was made until late in 1910. Meanwhile the road was being run by the Iowa Central (M&StL), much to the dissatisfaction of the new owners. How they overthrew the M&StL's operation is graphically related in the following letter by the late J. P. Boyle, formerly traffic manager of the little road.

President Boland and Vice President Sawyers figured that it would do no good to ask the M. & St. L. to hand the property over because there was a deficit then of about \$40,000.00 against it of expenses above income, so it was secretly decided to take the road by force. November 26, 1910, at 8:00 A.M. was the date and hour we were to go over the top. We borrowed a coach, engine, train and engine crew from the C. B. & Q. here [Centerville] and followed the regular M. & St. L. train out of here (after fixing the telegraph wire so it would not work) without their knowledge, without a train order or any rights what-



ever and arrived at Albia in due time after stopping wherever we found an employee discharging him as an A. & C. employee and hiring him as an employee of the S. I. T. Company. The M. & St. L. in some way heard we were coming and arranged that we would be allowed to go [to] their depot and then block the track so we could not get out and in that way compel us to sue for peace, but we anticipated that and stayed on our own track at Albia during the several days it took to fix matters up.

After that dramatic episode the Traction Company operated the road. Despite the name "Traction" the line continued to be run by steam. In June, 1914, the name was changed to the Centerville, Albia & Southern Railway after Frank S. Payne and D. C. Bradley of Centerville purchased the line. These men owned a majority of stock of the Centerville Light & Traction Company, which operated the street railway in Centerville, and which had built a short interurban to Mystic in 1910. The new management electrified the Albia line in the summer of 1914. In 1916 the name of the Centerville Light & Traction was changed to the Iowa Southern Utilities Company, and the CA&S was conveyed to the utilities firm.

By operating over local streetcar tracks at both terminals the Albia-Centerville interurban went direct to the railway stations. It made connections with Wabash, M&StL, and Burlington trains at Albia and the Rock Island and Burlington in Centerville. Agents also made Pullman reservations for passengers using connecting steam lines.



Two center-entrance cars with baggage, smoking, and a "ladies" compartment handled passengers; and two "box motors" (baggage-type locomotives) handled carload freight. The ladies' compartment provided privacy for female passengers, as the road hauled many miners who sometimes became quite boisterous, particularly on paydays.

Coal from the mines along the route provided a very substantial amount of freight. The interurban interchanged with all connecting steam railroads. For years, too, through package cars were run in conjunction with the Wabash to St. Louis, and via the Milwaukee to Chicago.

During the early years of the depression passenger service became unprofitable and it was withdrawn on the entire railroad in 1933. Eleven years later the  $2\frac{1}{2}$ -mile segment on the "Mystic Division" between Appanoose and Mystic was abandoned; in March, 1948, the  $10\frac{1}{4}$ -mile section of the historic main line north of Moravia was scrapped. Today, however, the remaining 16 miles of the road continues to handle freight, the bulk of which is coal from on-line mines to the large Iowa Southern Utilities electric plant in Centerville. The line is still run by Iowa Southern Utilities Company, although corporately known as the Southern Iowa Railway since 1941. Its president is Edward L. Shutts, who also heads the ISU.

FRANK P. DONOVAN, JR.